NEW LEVEL OF PRIDE, 4 | SLICE OF LIFE, 18 | LIVING SPACES, 25

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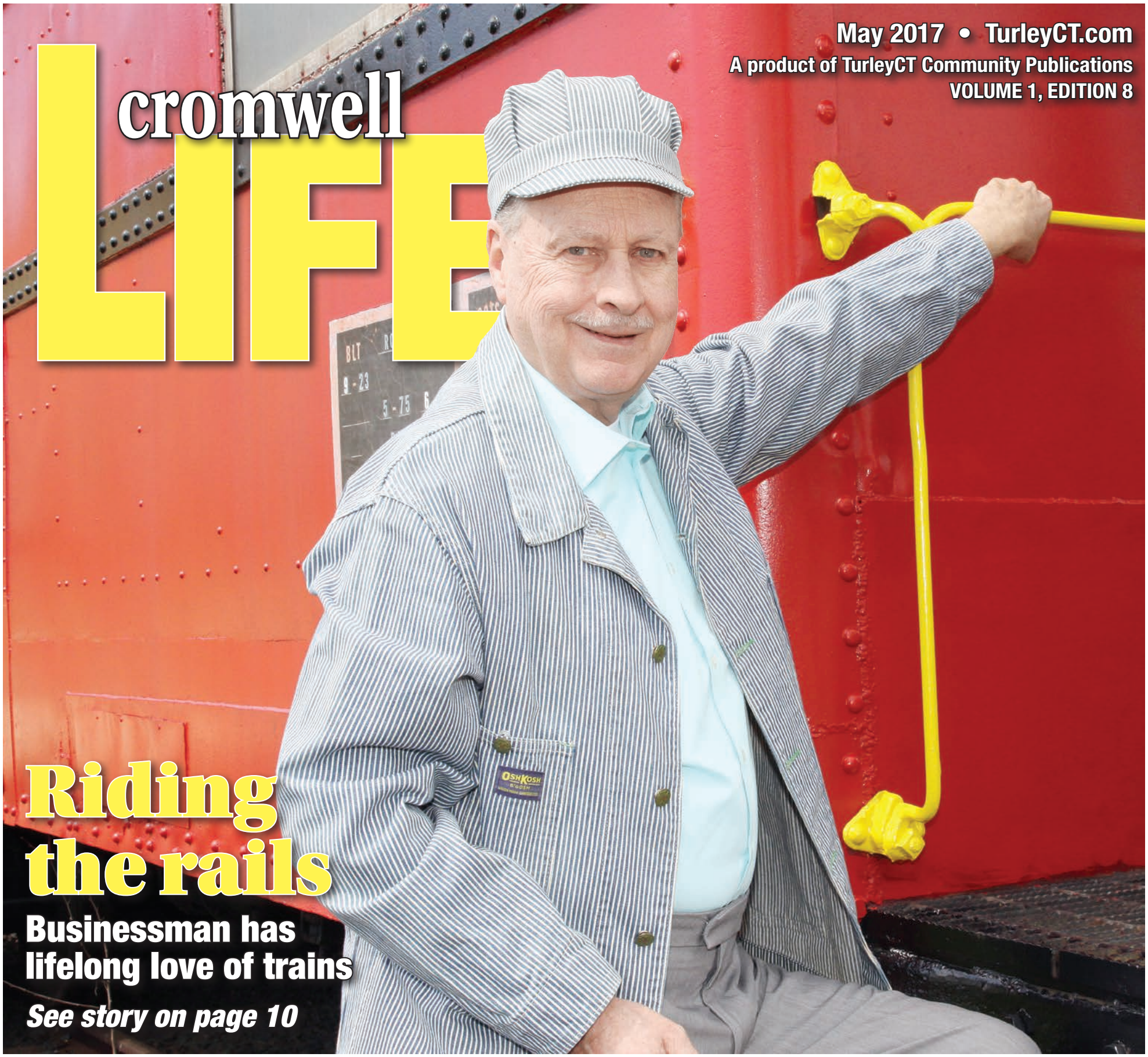

Riding the rails

Businessman has lifelong love of trains

See story on page 10

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"He's always been proud of his country and wanted to serve. Once he was in, he had a whole new level of pride."

- Jocelyn Harvey

See story page 4

ON THE COVER

Local real estate agent Glen Johnson enjoys sharing his love of trains with the public through his Main Street business.

Photo by Lisa Brisson
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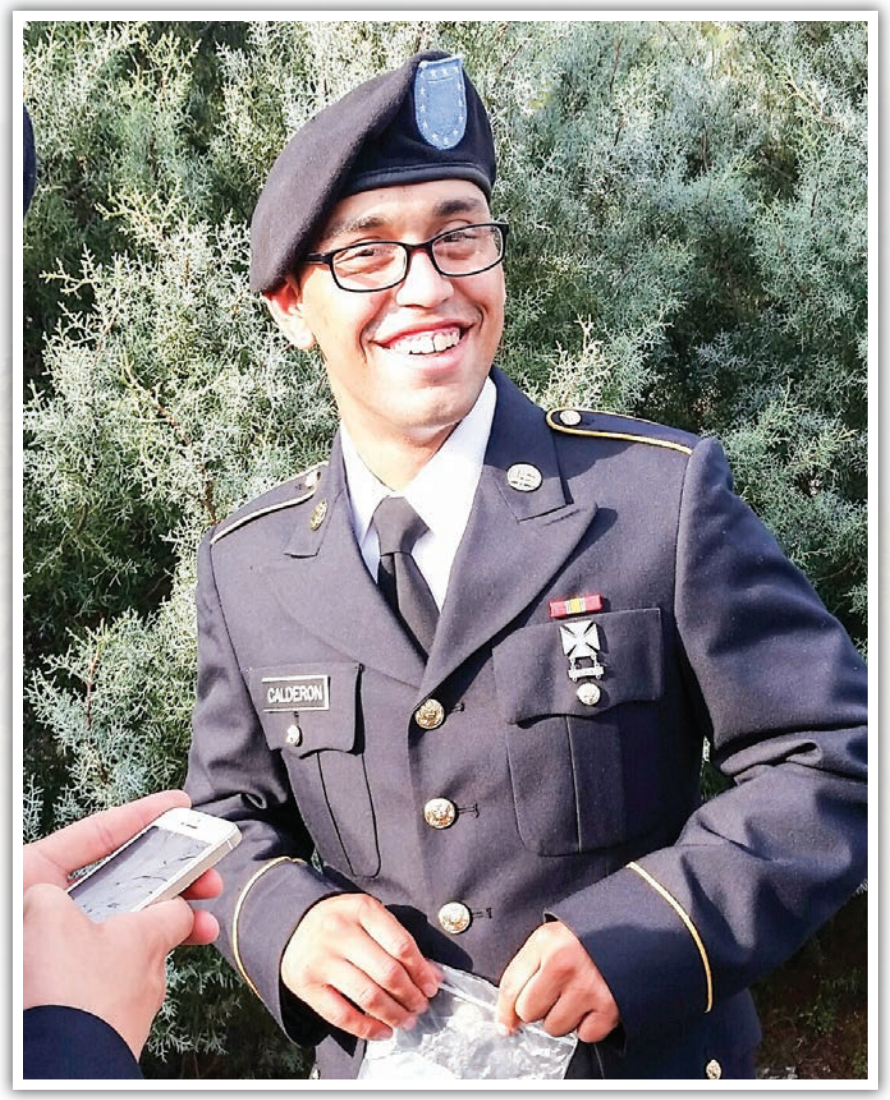
A whole new level of pride

He just wants the chance to serve his country

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer



Courtesy photos

Elijah "Eli" Calderon is battling an eye condition and fighting for the chance to resume his military career.

Elijah "Eli" Calderon wants to be all that he can be, but the U.S. Army won't let him, because of a medical condition. It started last summer when Calderon joined the Army and went through basic combat training.

"I wanted to learn new skills, travel the world," he said. "It was fun. It was about the best time of my life, the things you were learning, the new environment. It was hard, but it was still fun."

After graduating from boot camp, Calderon was ready for his next assignment at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, where he was going to be trained in motor transportation. It was there that a routine eye exam on the path to become a truck driver derailed his military dreams.

Calderon was diagnosed with keratoconus, a rare degenerative eye disorder that causes the normally domed shaped cornea to thin out and bulge into a cone shape. This results in distortion of vision, increased sensitivity to light and reduced visual acuity.

It was his third eye exam since enlisting.

"When he had an eye test when he first went in before basic training, they gave him glasses. This was the third test. They didn't catch it until the third time. It's great they caught it," his mother Jocelyn Harvey, a long-time Rocky Hill resident, said.

"I didn't even know how to spell it. We looked it up. We're still learning about it."

"We had never heard of it before," Calderon, 21, added. "We know it's bad."

In addition to dealing with the devastating diagnosis, Calderon soon found himself with another challenge. The Army discharged him in December, leaving him without work and medical benefits.

"When they told him [about the keratoconus], he lost his job, he lost the opportunity to go to school, his medical benefits, his signing bonus, everything that went along with the military just stopped. He was returned to civilian life as if it [his military service] didn't happen," his mother said.

"He's always been proud of his country and wanted to serve. Once he was in, he had a whole new level of pride."

– Jocelyn Harvey

If left untreated, keratoconus causes the eyesight to deteriorate to the point of a person becoming legally blind and needing a corneal transplant. If treated, the disease can be stopped and eyesight can be saved.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a treatment called corneal cross-linking; most insurance companies do not cover the procedure. Having it done for both eyes costs about $4,000.

"If he had Tricare, the military benefits, it would cover them. As of right now, the procedure is out of pocket," Harvey said.

While family members could perhaps save enough money over the next year or two, they are concerned because Calderon is already experiencing symptoms of the disease. So they started a GoFundMe page to raise money for the procedures.

Their goal is $5,000 and that would including paying for the procedures, as well as fees, the initial consultation, prescriptions, follow up, etc. He had surgery on the first eye Feb. 28. Calderon will have the second eye done two to three months after the first. It is a lengthy recovery period for each eye.

"He'll be out of work for six months," Harvey said.

Once the initial pain is better, they were told to expect weeks to months of healing.

"He won't be able to drive, he won't be able to watch TV, use the phone. The lights will affect the eye; he'll have blurry vision. It's a good amount of recovery time," she said.

The recovery period will be tough on Calderon because he is used to being active and in the months between his discharge and his surgery has worked doing snow plowing, hardwood floor refurnishing and work on a goat farm.

"Down time is not something I look forward to. It's going to be a lot of music and sitting there doing nothing, probably a lot of pacing," he said.

"I don't know if it is because of the disease, but I don't like anything near my eyes. It's going to be pretty awful."

Once the issue with his eyes has been treated, his top goal is a return to military service.

"The recruiter is willing to go to bat for Elijah. We're going to try. When he was discharged, he had a couple of recommendations that he be retained, but the final decision was a no," Harvey said.

"He would really like to go back. Elijah kind of struggled with finding a path, but once he got in, he found where he needed to be. If he could go back, he'd go back in a heartbeat," she added.

Terry Wilson, elementary science curriculum specialist for CREC magnet schools who was Calderon's fifth grade teacher at Stevens School, believes in his ability to persevere.

"When Elijah commits to something, he sees it through. This bump in the road that temporarily interrupted his dream of serving in the Army is just that. He is not going to let this get in his way, thus his search for a solution to his eye issues," Wilson said.

The teacher kept up with the family through the years.

"I remember him as a quiet young man who had a sweet smile. Elijah was fiercely proud of his dad, who served in the Army. He beamed from ear to ear when his dad visited his class and shared his experiences with his classmates."

Despite their current challenges, Calderon and Harvey are trying to focus on the positives, such as the GoFundMe campaign that raised more than $3,000 in one month, including donations from Calderon's Army friends and their families.

Jocelyn Harvey has started a GoFundMe page to help pay for her son Elijah "Eli" Calderon's eye surgeries.

"We're really kind of blessed people reached out and helped. It's been a blessing and we're very grateful that people are willing to invest in Elijah. He's made an impact on people that they want to give back to him," Harvey said.

As they watch his friends ship off to places such as South Korea and Germany, they're focused on Calderon's recovery and hoping for his eventual return to the military.

"The cherry on top would be the military, but him potentially losing his sight is really scary. But also to have a child that needs this direction and the path he was on. To me, they're both equally important," Harvey said.

"As a mom, you want him to be healthy first, but you also want him to be successful and happy, but this procedure will accomplish both. I don't think either one of us appreciated how important the path of being a soldier would be," she added.

"He's always been proud of his country and wanted to serve. Once he was in, he had a whole new level of pride." **CL**

Visit gofundme.com and search for elijahs-eyesight to make a donation.

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Spirit guide

Jo Homar moves from corporate world to healing world

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Jo Homar is working in the same building where she had a corporate career for years, but her current work is worlds apart.

While she's done everything from running a kitchen in a convalescent home to working as an executive assistant, Homar now devotes her time to helping others in a different way. She was working for a reinsurance company about five years ago when she noticed something curious.

"Every time I'd be coming to work, I'd be getting vertigo. I was not feeling well. I didn't understand what was happening. It was unsettling. I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm allergic to work,'" she recalled.

"I'd had a lot of heightened spiritual developments that were happening. I was fortunate enough to meet a craniosacral therapist, who was really intuitive, very helpful at that stage."

She came to realize that the vertigo was a sign of disharmony and that a career change was needed.

"It wasn't an easy decision. Society says we have to have a corporate job; we're supposed to plan. I've always done all those steps. I've always been a responsible individual. But there were vibrational shifts in my body, messages I was receiving," she said.

"I went and had a bunch of trainings and attunements. I was certified in Reiki and other healing modalities so I could better understand what was happening and how to use it to heal myself."

She didn't know at first that she would turn this experience into her own company, Bountiful Blessings, which offers intuitive healing and guidance, as well as Reiki and other services.

"I was given the name of my business in meditation one night. I didn't know what to do with it. I never ran a business before. I was still working with my corporate job," she said.

"I really liked my corporate job and I liked the individuals I was working with. If I wasn't guided in a holistic direction, I'd still be there today. I gave my boss a year's notice," she added.

"He was thrilled and I knew I needed for myself that amount of time to actually make the transition, not only physically, but mentally."

She first rented a room in Glastonbury and would see clients after work and on weekends before leasing a space on the Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield. This past November, she moved to the Corporate Ridge Business Complex in Rocky Hill, in the same building where she used to work.

Homar has had otherworldly connections since she was young.

"I had a lot of déjà vu experiences as a child growing up, meaning at an early age I'd be doing something and as I was doing it, [I'd feel] I had already done it before. I'd have conversations with individuals and knew exactly what they would say and what I would respond with before it would happen," she said.

"I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't have any one to talk to about it. It was not the norm for the family," added Homar, who grew up in a large family in Wallingford.

"I suppressed it and pushed it down and went about my childhood. Things started really changing when my mom was diagnosed with cancer in 2000. While she was in hospice, she would be verbalizing a lot of future events while in that in-between state of the physical world to the spiritual world.

"It really piqued my interest and reactivated a lot of things that I'd suppressed from my childhood," she said.

Homar struggled to deal with her mother's death. One day, one of her sisters was approached by a stranger at a bus stop.

"He said, 'I don't mean to upset you or scare you, but your mom wants to talk to your sister.' I've always believed in the psychic and spiritual realm, but she wasn't really into it. My sister was, 'Which one does she want to talk to?'

"He said, 'She wants to talk to the one who just built the big yellow house,'" Homar recalled, which described her home in Wethersfield.

"That was my first time meeting

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someone who had a gift like that," she added. "It really snowballed from there."

She has learned to use her gifts to help others.

"My sessions are always divinely guided. I'm always guided by spirit for each individual each time they come. They just book the time, whether it's healing or a reading or guidance or messages. A lot of times, it's both healing and guidance. Messages aren't just messages from spirit. There's really a whole healing aspect to it," she said.

"That's why I allow myself to be guided and focused on the individual each time they come. What you need when you come today might not be what you need the next time you come. It's always changing, it's always different," she added.

"The environment I create and the environment the spirit creates is a very caring and nurturing environment. The way the spirit works for me is it's always positive information that comes in. It's always a safe environment," Homar said.

"You never hear anything you're not ready to receive. I keep it positive. It's important that you come into a safe and professional environment."

Homar explained that there are four ways of perceiving energies, such as clairvoyance, which is clear seeing, and clear cognizance, which is simply knowing.

"I have ability to do all four. I don't get to choose; it's up to them. Most of the time the guides come in and I see them and they talk to me. It's just like we're having a conversation. I receive the conversation and I can relay it to the client," she said.

"My connection is a pure, straight connection to source, and it's visual and hearing, for the most part. It's like a three-way conversation."

Homar doesn't just work with people, she's also able to help animals.

"Pet communication was very surprising to me the first time it happened," she said.

"I've found throughout the years if energy, dead or alive, has a message to give, it will come through, whether it's an animal or a human, whether they speak English. It's like a grandmother who spoke only Italian and they have to speak to me in English. We're all energy beings, whether we're human or animal. I'm connecting with their energy, their

Jo Homar left a corporate job to pursue a career in intuitive healing and guidance.

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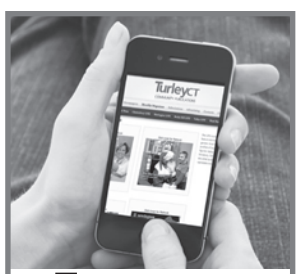
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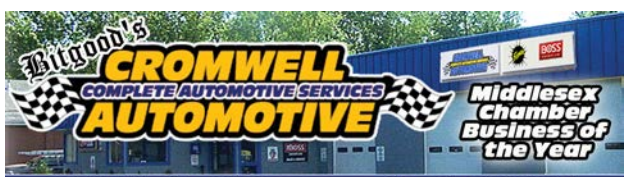
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soul, their being."

Deb Smith of Wethersfield sought Homar's services for both herself and her dog Skippy.

"I was feeling very unfocused, a little anxious and kind of blue. Also, I wanted to ask about my dog, who was acting very aggressive toward a workman at my house and has never been aggressive like that before. Jo explained the dog was worried about me, but subsequently calmed down," Smith said.

"Jo did a healing session which greatly relieved my anxiety, made me feel relaxed and lifted my spirits. Skippy wasn't there. It was just me, but she communicated with him anyway. [It's] hard to believe, I know, but she's the real deal."

Homar said it's not unusual to work with a client who is not in the room.

"It's just reading energy. I have a lot of clients in California. I don't see them unless it's through Facetime or Skype," she said.

She also works and teaches in Arizona and she and her husband, Howard, recently bought land there.

"There are a lot of like-minded individuals in that area. They're a lot more advanced or willing to learn or to engage in this type of healing work," she said.

Many of her clients make appointments because a loved one has died or because they have a medical situation and are looking for answers.

Homar doesn't ask for any history when a first-time client comes in. On one such encounter, the spirit told her to check for Lyme disease.

Although the client had already been checked for the illness and had been experiencing symptoms for five years, she had a different test and it came back positive for Lyme.

"She left me a voicemail; she was crying, she was so happy, not that she was diagnosed with Lyme disease, but that she had the answer and able to get on the correct course of treatment," said Homar.

She does not diagnose, but refers clients to physicians for testing. Another client came in for a regular session and Homar's guides told her that her thyroid needed to be checked.

"She's a singer. Obviously, her voice is very important to her. I got an email from her. They found thyroid cancer. They caught it soon enough to save her career, to save her voice. If something important comes up, I have an obligation to relay it," Homar said.

While she has special gifts, she said all people have abilities that perhaps they are not using.

"I've learned over the years that we all have an internal guidance system; we're all born with an internal guidance system. Some choose to be aware of it and some choose to ignore it. We all need help sometimes, whether it's guidance or healing," she said.

She encourages her clients to tune in.

"Pay attention to your surroundings. Our spirit wants us to be happy and healthy. As humans, we put blinders on and don't pay attention fully to those messages that come through. I only know what the spirit tells me.

"When the client comes in, I take my ego out of it. I'm not looking at the individual and analyzing the individual. The truth is going to come through and I don't let my ego interfere with that." **CL**

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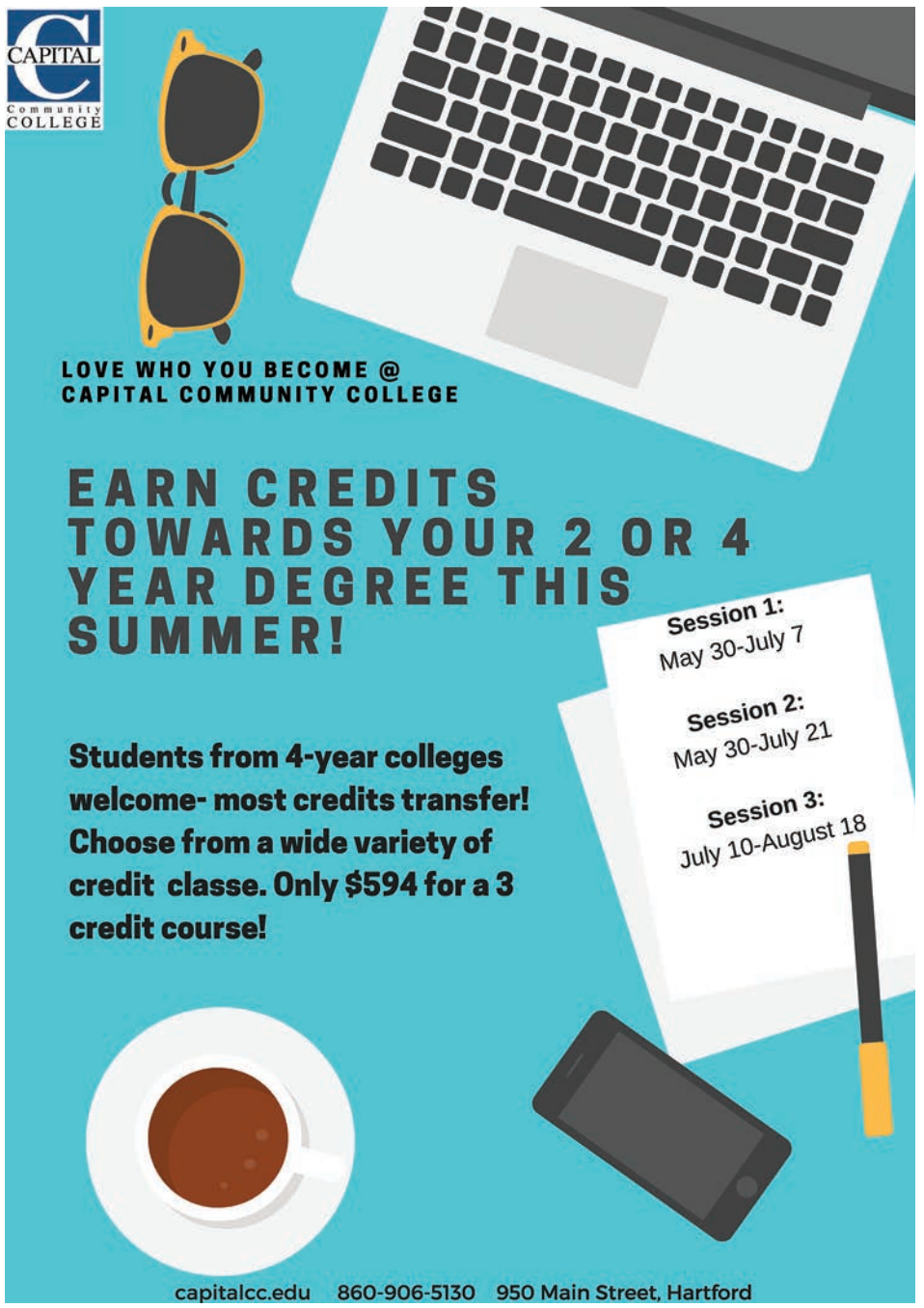
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Student of the month

She's an animal lover, and much more

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Brianna Jones can get excited about almost anything.

"I just started eating peas," the 7-year-old said with a proud smile.

A first-grader at Edna C. Stevens School, Brianna demonstrated a love for learning as she jumped from topic to topic.

"My favorite part of school is reading," she said. "I like Dr. Seuss, Littlest Pet Shop, chapter books, fairy books, mermaid books. I also really like math. We do subtraction and plus and we use cubes."

Brianna was most looking forward to an upcoming unit on metamorphosis because the class would get a pet to watch and care for.

"We're going to get caterpillars and tadpoles to learn about how they change," teacher Dayna Pentlicki said.

Any time spent with animals is Brianna's favorite kind of learning experience and she hopes it will directly affect her future career.

"I want to be an animal rescuer when I grow up," she said.

They are already a large part of her life. She and her family have a chocolate lab named Moose and a pit bull named Oakley.

"I also have a cat that likes to stare out the window and he kind of looks like a tiger," she said. "His name is Bobo and he jumps on my bed."

Brianna is currently working to train her dogs.

"I make them jump all the time," she said. "When they're bigger, they're going to pull sleds around the house."

Her favorite place to go is to the zoo where she can see as many animals as possible.

"My favorite part about going to the zoo is seeing all the foxes," she said, taking a slight pause to think. "But I also like seeing the wolves and coyotes."

She has an active imagination that comes out during her other favorite part of the school day – recess.

"There's a big shed outside and we usually rest there," she said.

Inspired by the Disney film "Moana," Brianna and her friends created a Hawaiian Club during recess where they pretend to be on the islands.

"When we're playing Hawaii outside we make up all types of stuff," she said. "We do fun activities. We pretend the slides outside are waterslides or we pretend to go fishing."

Outside of school, Brianna tries to find more ways to use her imagination by playing pretend with her friends. She also enjoys playing a video game where she can build her own world out of blocks.

"It's this game that's kind of like Minecraft but there's no zombies or skeletons," she said. "Sometimes I jump onto my wolf that I made or on the turtle I'm making."

She has already begun to assert her own opinions on topics that she finds important.

"The only pizza I eat is Freddy's Pizza, so if it's not Freddy's, I won't eat it," she said decidedly.

She enjoys spending time at home with her older sister Jasmine, 12, and looks forward to soon welcoming a baby brother.

Photo by Allie Rivera

Brianna Jones, 7, is energetic and imaginative. At recess, she enjoys playing with her friends in their Hawaiian Club, inspired by the Disney film "Moana."

"She's a good friend and a good sister," Pentlicki said.

Although Brianna stands out from her peers for her imaginative energy, her teacher said that it is also her hard work and dedication to school that makes her a special student.

"In the classroom, she's always working so hard," Pentlicki said. "She's a leader for everyone in the classroom and she always wants to help." **CL**

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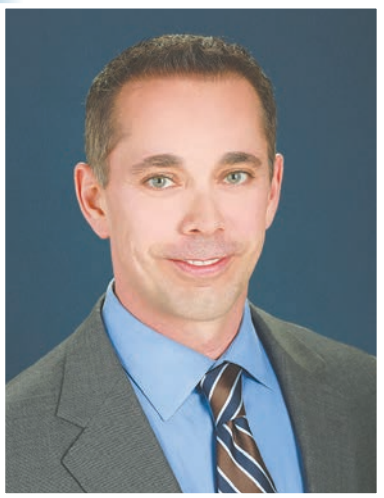

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Glen Johnson added a second floor to this rail depot that he uses for his real estate office.

Photo by Mara Dresner

Different vantage point

Glen Johnson has a lifetime fascination with trains

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Glen Johnson has enjoyed a long-time love of trains, dating back to his first wind-up toy train and electric train set. It's a hobby he's never outgrown.

"I've always been interested in trains," he said. "I just took a liking to it."

The lifelong Cromwell resident, who grew up where Stop & Shop is currently located, put his interest on hold for a bit as life got busy with college and then a job as a territory manager with Coca-Cola. He handled western Connecticut and Westchester County, N.Y., traveling back and forth between home and the company's headquarters in Atlanta.

"I didn't want to have to move all over the United States to progress with that company," he said.

So he ended up changing careers, switching to real estate in 1973. That decision helped reconnect him with his love of trains.

"There was a period in there where I didn't have the opportunity or the time to spend a lot of time researching for the railroad. It's time consuming, it's labor intensive," he said.

"Some people come in and I'll spend hours with them."

– Glen Johnson

His current office location, which he purchased in the late 1970s, is among one of the most recognizable landmarks in town. The space features a depot, box cars and a red caboose dating from 1924.

"I bought it because I knew if I didn't buy it, this part of history would be lost in this town. I could have made better investments," he said with a smile.

"There's a lot of history, which obviously I'm interested in. Trains were on the decline throughout the United States, particularly in Connecticut. That was something I was intrigued by," he added.

"I got more and more interested in it. I became friendly with a number of people at Valley Railroad [in Essex] and they helped me with these cars here."

Originally, he planned to purchase one additional box car.

"The box cars are actually from the Norden Company in Worcester. I went up to look at them with people from the Valley Railroad. I bought three; I think they bought seven," Johnson said.

"Between the time they were purchased and when they got down here, they had a fire. They lost three cars and I had lost one. That's why I only have two."

The box cars were built in 1911 and were brought to Cromwell by the Providence & Worcester Railroad. Once Johnson had the property, in many ways the real work was just beginning, especially considering that this was in the days before computers and easy online searches.

"I really started to research. In the real estate business, I had the wherewithal to do that," he said.

"Even the paint colors of this

building are what it was in 1880. It took me months and months. The Cromwell sign is identical to 1/16 of an inch to what was there in 1880."

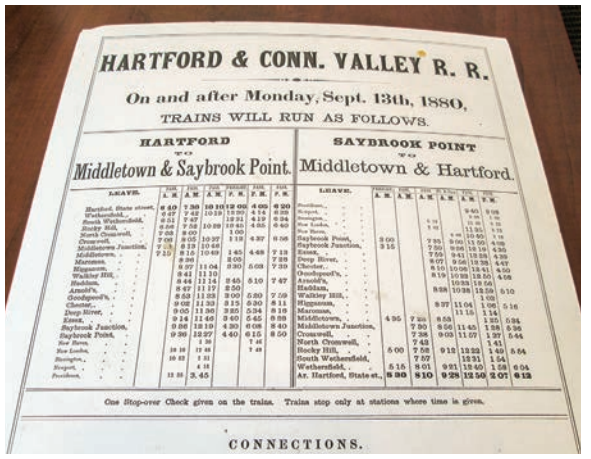
That sign was built and designed by Max R. Miller of Higganum, who was in charge of the track for Valley Railroad and is writing a book about it.

"I think it's something that kind of grew on him after he bought the station and restored it. He kept working on it; it's quite a nice place. Some people restore an old car or an old boat. He just got in love with that building," Miller said.

"He utilized it in a way that most people wouldn't. He formed an upstairs. Those old, old buildings are wide open. They didn't have any second floor."

Johnson uses the Main Street building to house his real estate offices. In the past, he and his wife had other businesses in the train cars: Caboose Creamery, an ice cream shop, and Kit & Caboose, a gift store.

Ultimately, Johnson said that the time involved in running the businesses grew to be too much. Today, Body Focus Therapeutic Massage occupies one of the box cars. The caboose is often a popular attraction at downtown events.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This rail schedule from the 1800s is one of many pieces of train-related memorabilia that Glen Johnson possesses.

It's a far cry from when the railroad brought everything from wild horses to flowers to hay to the town. Still, the cars attract a great deal of attention.

"I came in one morning and there was an older gentleman sitting by the outhouse. I said, 'Can I help you?' He was reminiscing, and said, 'I used to use this outhouse every morning when I got the trolley to Hartford.' The trolley used to share this track from Middletown to Hartford," Johnson said.

"Children gravitate and ask questions. You also can get information from these people; a lot of them are knowledgeable. It's fun and it's entertaining. It went right along with real estate because of this location. It's a super location finder."

In addition to the rail cars, Johnson collects rail-related memorabilia with a preference for items prior to 1940. Some items are larger, such as crossing signals, a wagon or the outhouse. Inside his office, he has items scattered around, such as a train schedule from the 1880s, and also has a display case with various items.

"I don't focus on just on one item like gems or coins. I [collect] anything that pertains to history of railroads, particularly in this area," he said.

He also, naturally, has some trains, including Lionel trains from the 1940s and Marx Toy trains, one that goes back to the 1920s.

"They are very unique toys because they were all metal; there's no plastic. A lot of collectors go after that. They would last forever if you took care

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of them," he said.

"Plus I have a G Gauge. Model trains go by guages. That differentiates the size of the track and the size of cars."

His is on a track near the ceiling of his office, which was originally a grain and hardware store.

"I totally stripped it. There was no water in the building, no bathrooms. We took all the interior wood down, numbered it and did what we had to do and put it back up. That's common in old homes, but it's not done a lot because it's very expensive," he said.

"This was a depot. It's where they brought the goods in. They also brought wild horses from out west in here. There were a lot of horse traders in this town."

Upkeep is an ongoing process.

"Just maintaining this property is almost a full-time job," he said.

"I have a painter coming here. Portions of this building have to be painted yearly. You have to research it. It's very, very time consuming. Just to maintain it takes a lot of time, to keep the appearance up, to not let it deteriorate."

When he was first restoring the property, Johnson could spend 40 hours a week on the restoration. Now it's around 10 to 20 hours, depending on the time of year and what needs to be done.

"I'm maintaining, I'm keeping. I believe if I did not purchase it, it would not be here today. There are very, very few of these structures left in the Northeast. You could probably count them on one hand. There are very, very few buildings where people can see how the railroad operated, how transportation worked in the 1800s, and a lot of people are very interested. It's great conversation," he said.

"Some people come in and I'll spend hours with them. There are not many places to go other than the Valley Railroad itself to [learn] how trains operated and the transportation system worked. It's good for the town," he added.

Johnson has worked with the Cromwell Historical Society. He is a major proponent of trains and train travel.

Photo by George Landis

Train buff Glen Johnson purchased these rail cars and has refurbished accurately down to paint colors.

"It's an extremely efficient way to transport, particularly goods that are heavy. It's definitely environmentally friendly. Two diesel locomotives can carry more in one train than 50 to 75 diesel trucks. If somebody is looking for a green environment, they're very, very environmentally friendly," he said.

Johnson also likes traveling on the rails.

"Much more than by plane or automobile, I do enjoy it. If you travel by train, you're looking by a different viewpoint. What you see by train is you're looking by the back door.

"It's a totally different vantage point. I'm very interested in that totally different view, on the environment, on life. I think you can see so much more. It's an enjoyable way to travel." CL

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Turning pain into progress

Lindsay Romano fights for research and awareness of brain tumors

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Receiving a phone call saying that a loved one has a brain tumor can feel like a punch to the gut. Lindsay Romano has answered that call not once, but three times. Instead of letting it crush her, she's used her pain to fight back.

"They say that brain tumors are rare, but it's not rare for me," the Newington resident said. "I've had three people in my immediate family diagnosed."

One day in May 2013, Romano was at work teaching eighth-graders at Cromwell Middle School when she saw that her mother was calling her. Knowing that her mom would understand she's at work, Romano decided to answer the phone.

She then learned that her mother had been diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Looking at her case, doctors decided that Romano's mother would need surgery to remove the benign tumor and, although it did help, this was not the end of their experience. Four months after her mother's surgery, Romano's father was also diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Unlike her mother's case, his was a glioblastoma tumor. Patients diagnosed with this kind of tumor have a median survival rate of about 14 months and only around 10 percent of those diagnosed survive five years.

Courtesy photo

Lindsay Romano participated in the first and helped to run the second Connecticut Brain Freeze, a plunge into Long Island Sound in March that raised $50,000 for the National Brain Tumor Association. She is in the red cap.

Treatments such as chemotherapy can be undertaken to lessen the tumor; there is no complete cure.

"It's called 'The Beast' because it's the most deadly," Romano said.

Due to the size and location of the tumor, surgery was not able to get all of the tumor and other treatments were used.

Hoping to continue living as normal a life as possible, she started the new school year when one day shortly into the fall semester her phone rang at work again.

It was then that she learned that her aunt, Fran Greb, was diagnosed

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Described as someone unwilling to settle, Lindsay Romano joined a group to Head to the Hill, speaking with legislators and lobbyists in Washington, D.C., about the importance of research on brain tumors.

with a brain tumor.

"This was the third phone call I received about someone having a brain tumor," she said. "It was overwhelming. It was like a black cloud was hanging over me."

Only weeks earlier, Romano, her aunt and other members of the family had gathered to participate in the New York City Brain Tumor Walk.

"Little did we know that my aunt at that time had a brain tumor herself," she said.

Like her father, Bill Newberry, Greb's tumor was aggressive. She went into a coma in June 2015, nine months after her diagnosis, and died two months later. Around that time, Newberry's condition started to deteriorate.

"I was with him and the disorientation for sure was going on, but he was walking around," Romano said. "Fast forward three weeks to Labor Day weekend and he'd lost all functions. That's why they call it The Beast, because it happened so quickly."

He died just over a month later. At the time, Romano said she had difficulty addressing all that had happened in her family and didn't speak about it with many people.

"Everything just happened so fast and I was totally blindsided," she said. "I wasn't really telling people about it because it all seems so crazy. It seems like I'm making it up."

Others who have been affected by brain tumors agree that talking about it can be difficult.

"It's hard to watch someone go through it and feel like you can't do anything. You feel helpless," her friend Tama Cobb said.

She is chairman of Connecticut Brain Freeze. Romano said that at the time this feeling of helplessness overwhelmed her.

"When something's broken, you want to fix it, which is funny because my father was a carpenter and he taught me how to fix things," she said, reaching for the hammer necklace she wears every day in his honor.

Once the initial shock of losing both her father and aunt had passed, she decided that she wanted to do something to help.

"I want to share my story and tell people about it," she said. "I was at appointments, I listened, I did research, I learned all that I could about this."

It was through that research that she found Connecticut Brain Freeze, a subset of the National Brain Tumor Society, an organization that was planning a polar plunge into Long Island Sound to raise funds in March 2016. At the time, there were no other major events for the National Brain Tumor Society in Connecticut.

After participating in the first plunge, Romano decided to join the committee to help plan the second plunge in March of this year. It was through this organization that she met Cobb whose nephew, Ken Pendleton, had died of a brain tumor.

"Lindsay is phenomenal, absolutely wonderful," Cobb said. "Her passion, her drive, just everything about her is so genuine and sincere."

Romano also befriended committee member and brain tumor survivor Lisa Reisman through Connecticut Brain Freeze.

"I met her first in 2015. She got in touch with me because I actually had a pretty lethal brain cancer in 1998 and I wrote a memoir," Reisman said. "This year she joined the committee and I got to know her a lot better."

As part of the committee for the event, Romano found herself surrounded by others who had also experienced the pain that comes when a loved one is diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Lindsay Romano fights to raise funds for brain tumor research after her mother's diagnosis and the death of her father, Bill Newberry, pictured, as well as her aunt.

"It was overwhelming. It was like a black cloud was hanging over me."

– Lindsay Romano

"I'm truly amazed by her strength. At one point I said, 'Lindsay, you are so incredibly strong,' and she said, 'you have no idea. I am not strong. I'm actually bitter about what happened. I'm really angry,'" Reisman recalled.

"She told me that the only thing that tempered it is her work with Connecticut Brain Freeze."

In part through her efforts with that organization, the March event raised $50,000. Romano said that, while certainly helpful, that amount is not enough for what needs to be done.

"We ended up raising close to $50,000 which, unfortunately, really isn't that much," she said. "I can just remember after my father's treatments opening up a bill that came to the house for $76,000. That bill just came to the house.

"The costs are immense. And people, once they start to lose their abilities, you want them to be as comfortable as possible, but how do you do that when everything costs so much?" she added.

"Unfortunately, now we're learning about cuts being made to health care that will only make this worse."

She has joined with a larger group of people from the National Brain Tumor Society for its upcoming Head to the Hill event where they will meet with legislators in Washington, D.C., to lobby for better brain tumor awareness and research.

"People like Lindsay, they're not going to take it laying down," Cobb said. "We're not going stop being vocal about it until, I'm convinced, one day there will be a cure. Or a better treatment at least."

Romano said she will continue to fight for research on brain tumors in honor of all those who have been affected, but especially for her mother – who will go for checkups every six months for the rest of her life – her aunt and her father.

"He should still be here today," she said. "He should be driving his Suburban. He should be a phone call that I'm able to pick up and make."

Romano hopes that by sharing her story, more people will be aware of brain tumors and look for signs that they may need to see a doctor.

"If you're suffering from headaches or vision loss, go get checked. A lot of times it's under-diagnosed," she said.

"Life can change quickly at any second. I want people to know that they're not alone and there are people out there to support them." **CL**

Where learning is fun

Bringing children to local museums can be great for everybody

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

Courtesy photos

One of the favorite spots of children visiting the Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society is the Discovery Space.

Kate Ebner, director of educational programs at the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, looked out her office window to see a couple of children outside having a blast rolling down the hill. It caused her to exclaim how much she loves her job.

For many museum curators, at one time the thought of having young, active, sticky fingered children amongst their collection was enough to cause much agitation. After all, children like to touch things, they like to talk, and they like to run – a mix that could have dreadful consequences for the antiques or priceless pieces on display.

While there certainly must be care and watchful eyes, much has changed for children visiting museums and several local museums are encouraging children to enjoy what they have to offer. Often they are allowed to touch things, dig in the dirt and run around, too.

"Nothing makes me happier than seeing young folks enjoy the museum and property," Ebner said.

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Kids LIFE

Children of all ages enjoy learning about open-hearth cooking at Farmington's Stanley-Whitman museum.

She encourages parents to bring their children to the museum at any age, saying it is a great opportunity for them and helps them also learn museum etiquette.

"I really do believe the sooner the better," she said, noting it's a misconception that you shouldn't bring young children to a historical house. "They will learn, they will learn why eyes only and learn about the collection."

Visitors of any age who visit the Hill-Stead will find a home designed by Farmington resident and architect Theodate Pope Riddle in the very first part of the 20th century. The house has original furniture and is well known for its fantastic collection of Impressionist paintings, including those by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, James M. Whistler and Mary Cassatt. Visitors can also enjoy the parklike grounds, including the sunken gardens.

While it might not seem like children would have any interest in old furniture or art, Ebner said that is not the case.

Children come to the Hill-Stead to enjoy such programs as storytime, art projects and workshops for school breaks.

"Storytime is for ages 2-4; siblings are welcome. That is a lot of fun because we are making art projects, reading stories together and always make a collection connection," Ebner said. "Even as young as these toddlers, we are bringing them into the historic house and introducing them to bits of information on the collection."

This summer the Hill-Stead will be partnering with the nearby Stanley-Whitman House for the first time. During the last week of their summer workshop, participants spend their morning at the Hill-Stead and the afternoon at the Stanley-Whitman House on High Street in Farmington.

This Colonial style home, built in 1720, is also fun for all ages.

"We are a pretty kid-friendly location," said Joan Zeisner, educational director at the Stanley-Whitman House, adding that the museum will purposely push furniture out of the way to ensure children who visit can explore as much of the home as they would like.

Young guests enjoy working in the garden and as they tour the house, learning about what life was like 300 years ago. Another popular part of visits are the characters guests may meet.

She has seen children have a great time interacting with the museum's volunteers who dress up in period garb.

"They can be pretty convincing," Zeisner said of the characters.

Children can ask them questions and the characters show them how people cooked over a hearth or played Colonial games.

She encourages parents to bring their young children to the museum before they even start kindergarten.

"This is their heritage and it's

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"We like to share the riches that we know existed 300 years ago; the kids really do get pumped up for it."

–Beth Sweeney

becoming increasingly difficult for children and schools to learn history as we once learned it," Zeisner said.

In West Hartford, children can also have a Colonial experience when they visit the Noah Webster House and West Hartford Historical Society.

When young guests are shown what a chamber pot is and what it was used for, the common response is "ewwwww," said Beth Sweeney, director of education.

Cooking demonstrations over the hearth get a more positive response.

As with other museums the interactive activities are a big hit. Here children can visit the Discovery Center consisting of three rooms that were part of the original house, which is now a hands-on area for children.

Guests can put on costumes depicting the Colonial era, visit the pantry that is filled with imitation foods that colonial people would have eaten and there is a representation of the farm from what it looked like when Noah Webster lived there. Children can also get their hands dirty in the archeological dig area, where they can find replicas of items that were found on the site during an authentic dig.

Children also enjoy the street map that depicts the town roads from the 18th century and comparing it to the modern street map on display.

The museum works with the local schools and part of the fifth grade curriculum is to research a Colonial person and come to the museum dressed up as that individual. This living history program makes an impression on the students as they spend time in a Colonial schoolroom and learn about Colonial life, Sweeney said.

"They cook their lunch in that program; they learn about chores they did back as Colonial children such as mucking stalls or cutting wood, nothing like what they do today."

Whether a student comes to the museum as part of a school program or with their family, Sweeney said they would get a taste of the past.

"It's history and we are big history buffs here," she said.

"We like to share the riches that we know existed 300 years ago; the kids really do get pumped up for it." In Wethersfield the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum on Main Street in Old Wethersfield often hosts school groups and has the occasionally young history buff stop in, too.

First Sunday at the Hill-Stead offers a wide variety of activities for children.

Tours of the three colonial-era homes are mostly geared for adults, but guides are quick to share details of 18th century life that will appeal to children.

Like at other historical homes bathroom humor gets a rise out of children and the privy's are a big draw for younger visitors.

"They are fascinated by that," Cynthia Riccio, education director, said.

"I think more than anything we are flexible," Riccio said, adding that activities often reserved for school groups can be shared with families who bring their young children to the museum too. For instance there are several colonial games that children have fun learning how to play.

Riccio said the museum is most appropriate for children in the fifth grade age range, although third graders enjoy it as well.

"Their phones are not out, they are not texting, they are not on social media. They are engaged, which is good." CL

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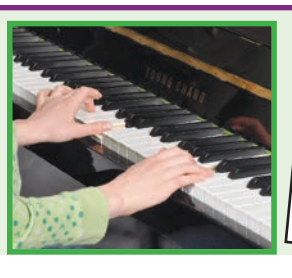

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Allie Rivera

The gymnasium at Cromwell High School was abuzz with excitement the evening of April 3 when the Cromwell Middle School Parent-Teacher Organization hosted the Harlem Wizards trick basketball team. The district-wide fund-raising event put the Wizards up against a team of teachers and administrators from the Cromwell Public Schools.

Harlem Wizards come to town

1. Cromwell High School Student Council members, from left, Matt Sbriglio, Sam Graf, Grace Drew, Kaitlin Lewkowicz and Amanda McFarlin volunteered to help sell popcorn and candy. **2.** Anikin Leary, left, showed off his Harlem Wizards poster as he waited with Wyanti and Amy Leary for the game to start. **3.** Children who purchased an official Harlem Wizards jersey were able to play as part of the Wiz Kids, a small group who practiced on the court before the game started. **4.** Visitors had a chance to purchase official Harlem Wizards merchandise from Cromwell High School Student Council volunteers including, from left, Katie Dansereau, Ashley Donlon, Cody Swanson, Matthew Zaino and Cameron Swanson. **5.** Teachers and administrators who didn't play served as cheerleaders. **6.** Wizards player Space Jam signed shirts and other memorabilia for fans. **7.** The Cromwell team discusses strategy. **8.** The Wiz Kids posed with members of the Harlem Wizards before the game. **9.** The event was a night out for the Friend family. Pictured, from left, are David, Louis, Donna and Owen Friend. **10.** Scott and Allison Branning snacked on popcorn with their dad, Craig.

5
CROMWELL ALL-STARS
CO-EDS
26

6
HARLEM WIZARDS

7
EXIT
32
5
12
18

8

9

10

News roundup

Church will hold auction

St. John Church presents its 19th annual live and silent auction beginning at 6 p.m. May 20 at the church, located at 5 St. John Court. Admission includes catered hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, beer, wine, soft drinks, coffee and dessert.

Tickets are on sale in the church office for $25 now and $30 after May 14. The silent auction begins at 6 p.m. and the live auction kicks off an hour later. Call 860-635-5590 for additional information.

Knights host basketball event

The Desoto Knights of Columbus Council 6 of Cromwell hosted a recent Free Throw Contest. Shown are, from left, Grand Knight Tom Butler, Free Throw Co-Chairman John Monarca, 12-year-old girls winner Gabriella Voccio, 13-year-old boys winner Nino Uccello, 9-year-old boys winner Samuel Brooks, 10-year-old boys winner Benjamin Brooks and Deputy Grand Knight Michael Parent.

Other winners were Caroline Voccio (10-years-old girls) and Guy Cantone (11-year-old boys). Winners advanced to the district tournament. This annual event is open to boys and girls ages 9-14 and is coordinated by all Knights of Columbus councils.

Jazz comes to CHS

Cromwell High School presents a Jazz Cabaret at 6:15 p.m. June 3. The evening begins with a silent auction and the music kicks off at 7 p.m.

Film rights to book acquired

Performances by the studio big band, Jazz II, "Top Secret" jazz choir and vocal jazz soloists are planned. Admission is $10 and all funds raised will support the high school's music programs. Funds may be used to upgrade the auditorium's sound and lighting systems. For details call 860-214-7924 or email chsperformingarts@yahoo.com.

Not just for children

Olga Rodriguez and her grandchildren, Ashley Moore and Michael Mitchell, enjoy the drop-in Coloring For Adults program offered Wednesday evenings from 6:15-7 p.m. at the Cora J. Belden Library in Rocky Hill. Any adult can stop by and color with pencils and coloring books in the tables located upstairs. Rodriguez shows her grandchildren, Ashley Moore and Michael Mitchell, what she has been working on.

Film rights to book acquired

A production company recently purchased the film rights to the book "Barnstorming America" by Rocky Hill resident John Molina. It chronicles the early days of women's professional basketball in the United States.

Molina attended the NCAA women's national basketball final four in Dallas, Texas, and did a book signing. He was joined by players from seven of those legendary teams.

Classic car show returns

Rocky Hill Parks and Recreation is

Not just for children

Photo by Lisa Brisson

Knights host basketball event

teaming up with the Over the Hill Gang Eastern Chapter to showcase beautiful old cars from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 7 at Elm Ridge Park. Food and music will be available and cars will be eligible for dash plaques and trophies. Proceeds will benefit the Rocky Hill Human Services Energy Assistance Program, Connecticut Association of Foster & Adoptive Parents and the Rocky Hill Summer Concert Series. For further information call 860-258-2772 or log on to rockyhillct.gov/parkrec or overthehillgangcarclub.com.

Unique flag is preserved

The Rocky Hill Historical Society recently came into possession of an unusual old American flag. The large flag bears 34 stars set in a star pattern and is believed to date from the Civil War.

It was stored with the town Parks and Recreation Department for many years. Town Historian Robert Herron said his research thus far indicates this type of flag is rare. It measures 30 feet by 20 feet and is in tattered condition.

A.G. Parker, the local postmaster in 1862, purchased the flag for $70. A newspaper report from 1917 indicates that it flew from a pole in front of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church for 10 years after the end of the war until the 100-foot pole was struck by lightning and destroyed.

Unique flag is preserved

Correction

A story in the March issue about Bruce and Laurie Huffaker and their involvement with Joni and Friends Wheels for the World contained an incorrect email address. Those wishing to contact the Huffakers may do so at bchuffaker03@gmail.com. **CL**

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Bella

Bella is a domestic shorthair with tiger stripe features. She's 6 years old and a typically curious cat. Her ideal home would be a quiet environment with children who are gentle with and respectful of animals. Bella has a moderate energy level and needs to be an indoor cat only; she should not be allowed to roam.

Conrad

Conrad is a friendly terrier and American pit bull mix who is a few months short of his ninth birthday. He's looking for a family that lives in either a single-family home or condominium. He needs to be the only pet and requires a lot of exercise. Any children should be more than 10 years old. The best fit would be a family with prior pet experience.

Inquiries about adoption may be made at the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Road, Newington. Call 860-594-4500. More information, including videos, can be found online at cthumane.org. Click on "Adopt" and "Newington." The Connecticut Humane Society is a private organization and has no time limits for adoption.

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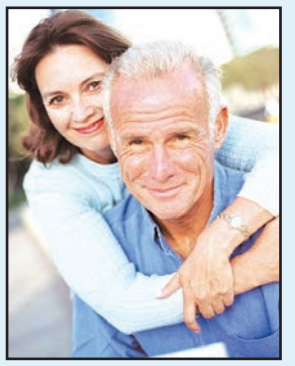

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Editorial

Get outside and smell the fresh air

Winter is finally over, not that we had all that bad a season. There were a couple of significant snow storms but, for the most part, the flakes held off and the temperatures didn't plunge all that often.

Then came a rain-soaked April. But as the old folk tale goes, "April showers bring May flowers." We are already starting to see the beauty of nature coming back to life.

No matter how long one has lived in this area, it is still a delight to see the annual renewal that occurs at this time each year. The sun seems brighter, attitudes seem better, everyone seems to have a little more spring in their step.

Speaking of steps, how about getting out of the house or office and taking a bunch of those? Some towns are sponsoring walking contests. But whether there's an organized effort or not, why not take advantage of the good weather by getting a little exercise?

We're not just talking about children and young adults who all too often seem consumed with smart phones and video games. There are plenty of people of all ages who are addicted to their phones, or watch television multiple hours a day, or who just show a lack of motivation to do much of anything.

The human body is designed to move. It is not designed to sit for long periods every day, although school and jobs sometimes leave us no choice. But we can still try.

Exercise is good for our circulatory system and our hearts. It can help control or even bring down high blood pressure. It can help us digest food. It can help us sleep.

Science has discovered that exercise produces endorphins that positively affect our cognitive functions and our attitudes and feelings. Think about it – have you ever seen someone jumping up and down yelling "Wow, am I depressed?" Probably not.

In a world where people seem to be losing personal touch with one another, let's strap on some comfortable shoes or sneakers and take a walk. Greet the people you pass on the sidewalk. Wave to folks in their yards. Maybe even make a new friend or two.

If you don't want to walk, ride a bicycle. That's a great way not only to get some exercise but to travel from place to place in a manner that more closely connects you to your surroundings.

Some folks bike to and from work. That may not be for everyone but it's the ultimate "green" idea. With all of the pills and oils and special programs promising to give us incredible health if we are only willing to part with our money, the tried and true approach is as solid as it ever was.

Watch what you eat and get regular exercise. It's that simple. Here's to celebrating the season by getting out of the house and moving around. **CL**

living spaces

Home and Garden

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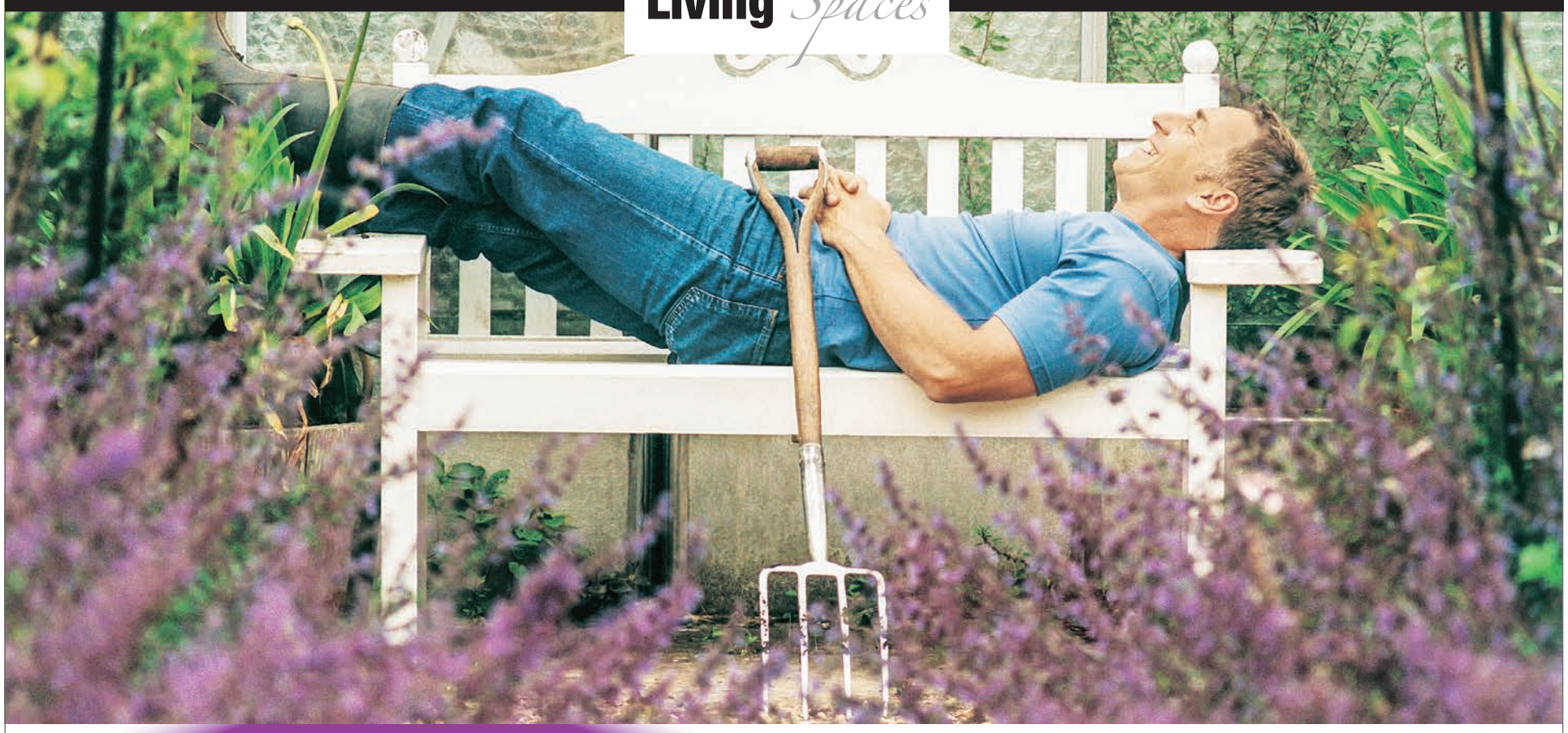

Men who garden

Women aren't the only ones growing flowers

by Lynn Woike
Editor

While most garden clubs are comprised totally of women, some organizations formed around individual plant varieties have many men.

Steve Kovack was an honorary member of the West Hartford Garden Club until becoming a full member about four years ago.

He is its only male member.

The Farmington Garden Club has none. Hill and Dale Garden Club in Glastonbury and the Avon Garden Club also have no male members.

"It's not that we don't want them, we just can't get them," said Jan Brigham.

Kovack said he grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania, with 200 chickens, three cows, some beef cattle and pigs – and an acre of garden that he began running when he was about 12. When he moved to West Hartford, he planted shade gardens around the house along with taking a community garden plot.

"I grow everything," he said.

The reason he became involved with the club is because he was taking the master gardener course that required him to do a volunteer project. The West Hartford Garden Club was taking care of the Butler-McCook House and Garden in Hartford and asked him to develop a shade garden.

It required him to clear away debris and rip out a lot of ivy, including poison ivy and otherwise "sawing through this forest."

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Club ladies fell in love with me," Kovack said, adding that he could be the only man in the club because he thinks "a lot of men get intimidated."

"In the spring I came back. Thousands and thousands of bulbs were in blossom. They had been dormant and so they started coming up. That blew my mind. I was part of this creation."

Kovack went on to help plant hostas and built a path though the woods.

"I tried to get other men to join, but they just didn't. They just don't want to be part of it for some reason. ... The men that I know don't do much gardening and they're all very independent."

He thought perhaps it had to do with the socializing that goes on among women and men not wanting to be part of groups, yet he talked about the friendships that he has formed with a diverse group of men he's gardened with in the community plot for years.

"The garden club is so excited about the community garden, they want to put us on their tour" for 2018, Kovack said.

Although The Gardeners of America/Men's Garden Clubs of America lists no clubs in Connecticut, there is one just for men: the Men's Garden Club of Wethersfield. It formed in 1956.

The November Richard Prentice moved into his new home, the gardens were dormant.

"In the spring I was overwhelmed with new growth and didn't know what to do about it," he said.

He attended the plant sale held by the club in May and became a member after that. Now he is the treasurer.

"Sometimes when I mention that I'm in a men's garden club I'm asked if I'm gay. ... Maybe that's why few men join. I've been to women's club meetings. They are much more organized. That's a problem," he said.

The club belonged to the National Garden Clubs, but was ejected because of its men only membership. While the club hasn't exactly forbade women to join, it hasn't recruited women and one that was once sponsored by a member several years ago "got nowhere."

According to its Facebook page, the club devotes "its energies to the promotion of the full appreciation of gardening, landscaping and horticultural activities," promoting "higher garden standards in the community for the benefit of individuals" and instilling "the love of growing plants in the hearts of children, particularly among those for whom opportunities are restricted."

The club also promotes friendships, civic activities and a general interest in individual, private and community gardens, planting and parks.

Its most significant community project is the care and maintenance

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Living Spaces

of the Frank W. Weston Rose Garden, located adjacent to the town hall and library. Members meet Saturday mornings during the growing season to care for the beds. Its annual plant sale the day before Mother's Day draws crowds, both for the hanging baskets and vegetable plants, and also for the "home-grown," a large variety of perennials that have been split from members' gardens.

That's what hooked Fred Odell when he was 35 … 38 years ago.

He'd done planting at his prior home, so when he saw a sign for the plant sale, he stopped.

"Man," he remembered thinking, "these were the friendliest guys I've ever met."

He ended up going home and getting some plants he'd been growing, bringing them back to the sale. That got him invited to the post-plant sale meeting.

"Within a year, I'm running the plant sale. Then I got to be president," Odell said.

He also became a master gardener.

At 72, he said he's one of the youngest members. Most are retired and older. While most are from Wethersfied, members also come from Glastonbury, Rocky Hill, Cromwell and South Windsor.

"We do enjoy solving problems when they arise. … We try to help each other," he said, noting that seems to be what was behind the formation of the original group of men – some who were farmers and others in a variety of agricultural occupations.

"They had a group of guys who'd just chat. They were friends. It was very informal. … They would meet at each other's houses once a month or so."

As more men joined, the club formed. Officers were elected, committees were formed and speakers were featured. Social events got added to the schedule.

Now, rather than corn and tobacco, conversations are more likely to be about shrubs and lawns, said Odell, who estimated that a third of the club lives in condominiums, "and their gardening is far reduced from what it was, and they're not into homegrown so much anymore."

When the club formed, he said, "There were four or five other gardening clubs and presently there are three women's gardening clubs in town. … Twice in my 30 years, females have inquired about becoming members, but it's an issue that kind of dies on the vine. It's not something that's on the top of our list. … None of our wives want any part of us. They do their own thing.

"I'm in many other organizations, and women tend to be detail oriented, very thorough. Men are scattered."

While he said he's "never attempted to join any other garden club," for a while he was a member of the New England Hosta Society and, together with his wife, who he said is "much more of a gardener," he began a garden club at the lake where they have a summer home.

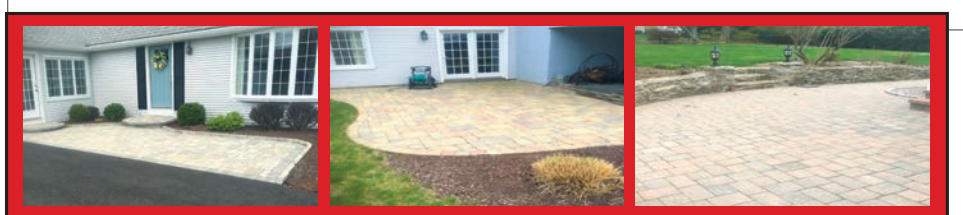
Tom Mierzejewski and his wife, Jenne McDermott, love gardening and maintain a parklike setting around their home, but their real passion is orchids, which they use to decorate their home's interior.

He supported his wife in founding the Nutmeg State Orchid Society in 2008 – she as the president and he as the treasurer. Of its 200 members, nearly half are men – some who have joined with their wives and some who come alone.

While the median age is about 50, it's a diverse group in both expertise and in age, including a teenage boy.

Hearing most garden clubs have no male members, Mierzejewski was surprised and wondered how clubs went about recruiting members.

The Nutmeg State Orchid Society prides itself on making everyone feel welcome, he said, with name tags, emails and a welcome package. CL



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Green tips for black thumb gardeners

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

As springtime rolls in and yards turn from muddy brown to fresh green, it can be challenging for those who have a self-described "black thumb" in the garden.

With a few simple tips, however, those with gardening difficulties can start to get their plants in shape.

Before giving up completely on being able to garden, there are a few questions that should be asked.

"What exactly are you trying to grow? Are you basing it on one experience, or have you repetitively tried different plants in different areas?" said Don Woods, owner of Stonehedge Landscaping and Garden Center in Newington. "There's usually a reason."

Woods suggested that for some people it might be necessary to have their soil tested to make sure that it is hospitable for growing.

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Adding topsoil or compost could help to improve growing conditions.

"I would definitely recommend that they start from the ground up," Peggy Bosco, co-owner of Bosco's Garden Center and Landscaping in Simsbury, advised.

"You want to enrich your soil because that's where your plants get all their nutrients from."

For those who need to improve their soil, Bosco recommended using an organic topsoil as opposed to a synthetic one.

"Every time you dig a hole to put something in the ground, that plant is going to be there for years," she said. "Organic soil would build that base organically as opposed to keeping a synthetic product there."

Another large piece of advice from planting professionals stems from a common problem they have seen with clients.

"Number one, don't overwater," Bruce McCue, owner of McCue Gardens in Wethersfield, said.

While many plants simply require water, soil and sunlight, too much water can be irreversibly damaging.

"The worst thing is overwatering a plant, actually, because once you rot the root system, you can't bring it back," Bosco said. "Overwatering tends to be worse than underwatering."

There are clues to look for that show a plant is being overwatered, including wilting when the soil is wet, brown leaves and rotting roots. According to Bosco, watching plants to see what they need is a crucial piece of gardening.

"The leaves and the plants will show you when they need water. They're talking to you, you just have to know how to listen," she said. "Everybody that works here is educated in that field. They would tell you how a plant shows you that it's thirsty."

Each of the garden professionals also stressed the importance of knowing what you are planting and where.

"Read the tags as to whether it goes in the sun or shade," McCue said. "A lot of people will put a plant for shade in the sun and a plant for sun in the shade, and that's not a good environment for them to grow."

Bosco agreed looking at a garden or yard's specific conditions is integral to the success or failure of a plant.

"Plant the plant in the right conditions," she said. "You have to have the right plant not only for our environment here in the Northeast, but also for the conditions that you're offering."

The experts said that people should remain realistic about what they can plant, and the professionals at each of their garden centers can help guide visitors toward making the right choices.

"There definitely are plants that are easier to grow than others," Bosco said. "Native plants are typically easier. Once you start getting into specialties and perennials, those would usually need special fertilizers."

"If you're specifically looking at gardens, tomatoes are easy. If you're doing perennials, hostas are easy. Most trees and shrubs are relatively easy to grow," Woods said. "It's really about proper depth and proper after-care."

Most importantly, all three of the plant experts encourage those who believe they have a "black thumb" to ask questions at their local gardening center.

"We have people here who can help with any of those questions," Woods said. "People can always come by and get help." **CL**

Stonehedge Landscaping and Garden Center is located at 1616 Willard Ave., Newington. They can be reached at 860-667-1158 or online at www.stonehedgelandscapingco.com.

Bosco's Garden Center and Landscaping is located at 1376 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury. They can be reached at 860-658-2428 or online at www.boscosgardencenter.com.

McCue Gardens is located at 47 Hartford Ave., Wethersfield. They can be reached at 860-529-5967 or online at www.mccuegardens.com.

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Finding the right fencing fit

Homeowners choose to erect fences on their properties for various reasons. Parents may find fences provide peace of mind during those times when their youngsters are playing in the yard, while other homeowners prefer fences for the privacy they can provide.

Whatever compels homeowners to consider fencing for their properties, those that have decided to install fencing will soon realize they have numerous options. Finding the right fencing material for your property requires considering a host of factors, including budget and personal style.

Aluminum

Aluminum fencing is ideal for those looking for something that's both ornamental and functional. Aluminum fencing may not appeal to those homeowners whose biggest priority is privacy, as aluminum fences are not solid walls. But aluminum fences are typically low maintenance, and they can be effective at keeping both kids and pets in the yard. Aluminum fences painted with a rust-inhibiting primer may require even less maintenance than aluminum fences painted without primer.

Bamboo

Bamboo is a less traditional fencing option that may appeal to homeowners who want to do something that's both different and eco-friendly. Bamboo grows naturally, which should appeal to homeowners who want their homes to have as little negative impact on the environment as possible. Bamboo provides ample privacy and comes in various styles. Homeowners should consult with a fencing specialist before choosing a style so they can be certain they choose the most climate-appropriate option.

Chain-link

Chain-link fences may not add the aesthetic appeal homeowners are looking for, but they are relatively inexpensive, durable and functional. Chain-link fences are low maintenance, though homeowners looking for fences to provide some privacy may need to get creative if they install chain-link fencing. Planting flowers, shrubbery or trees near chain-link fences can add some aesthetic appeal and a little privacy.

Vinyl

Among the more expensive fencing options, vinyl can make up for that initial sticker shock thanks to its durability. In addition, vinyl fences require little maintenance, saving homeowners the expense of paying for upkeep such as repainting. Vinyl fencing comes in various styles, and homeowners can choose the style that best suits their priorities with regard to aesthetic appeal and privacy.

Wood

Of course, no discussion of fencing would be complete without mentioning wood fencing. Many homeowners love wood fencing because of its versatility with regard to design and color. The options are endless when it comes to crafting wood fencing, which also can be stained in any color homeowners prefer. Wood fencing can be designed not only for homeowners who prioritize privacy, but it also can be crafted for homeowners for whom privacy is not a significant concern. Wood is a relatively inexpensive fencing material, but the maintenance required to keep wood fencing looking great can sometimes be costly and time-consuming.

Options abound for homeowners looking to add fencing. Homeowners hesitant to choose a material and/or install their own fencing can consult local professionals to find the best fencing fit for a property. **CL**

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How to plant a tree for successful growth

More sunlight and warm temperatures frequently inspire homeowners to spend more time in the great outdoors during spring and summer. Outdoor projects often top homeowners' to-do lists in spring and summer, with gardens and landscapes taking center stage. Planting more trees around the yard is one popular project that can improve property value and benefit the environment.

Why plant trees?

There are plenty of reasons to plant trees. Trees provide a natural form of shade, reducing air temperature by blocking the sun's rays. This can reduce reliance on air conditioning systems and make it more comfortable to spend time outdoors during the summer.

North Carolina State University College of Agriculture & Life Sciences says trees absorb and block noise and reduce glare. They also can trap dust, pollen and smoke. Trees also absorb carbon dioxide and potentially harmful gasses from the air. One large tree can supply a day's worth of oxygen for as many as four people, while also storing 13 pounds of carbon per year.

Getting started

Visit a garden center or nursery and select a tree that will be hardy in your planting zone. Choosing native trees can increases the likelihood that the new tree will adapt to its surroundings. Also, inspect trees to determine if they're healthy before taking them home. Look for evidence of root girdling, which occurs when the roots circle around the perimeter of the container and surround the trunk. Trees should not have any dead or dormant branches.

The DIY Network suggests locating the tree where it can thrive. This means selecting a spot that can make it easier for the tree to grow tall and wide. Avoid planting near the house, where roots can crack concrete or asphalt, and always plant away from underground pipes.

Planting the tree

Now it is time to amend the soil. It's not enough to enrich only the soil in the hole where the tree will be placed. Move out into a circular area beyond where the roots will start so that roots can expand and properly anchor the tree. The next method of success is to ensure that the tree has a large enough hole to contain the existing root ball and allow for roots to grow and expand. Better Homes and Gardens experts say to prepare a hole that is two to three times as wide as the root ball of the tree. Treat the root ball gently. If the roots are wrapped in burlap, remove the burlap or push it to the bottom of the hole.

Backfill the hole with soil and check that the tree is straight. Stake the tree to help it stay upright and straight until the roots anchor it more effectively. A layer of mulch around the base of the tree can prevent weeds and reduce water loss. Water daily for several weeks until the roots have fanned out.

It's best to leave trees be for the first growing season, only removing broken or diseased limbs. Resist pruning and shaping until the tree has survived its first growing season. **CL**

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The benefits of backyard koi ponds

Koi ponds can make for beautiful additions to landscaped backyards or home gardens. While many people are drawn to koi ponds because of their aesthetic appeal, there are many additional reasons for homeowners to consider installing koi ponds in their backyards.

Ponds and water gardens can transform yards rather quickly. Ponds can add appeal to otherwise mundane yards and provide eye-catching, relaxing spots to sit and enjoy the scenery. Koi ponds have recently fallen into a favor with homeowners in North America, but these popular water features date back several centuries to Asia.

Centuries ago, Chinese rice farmers began keeping carp in their rice paddies, and that practice eventually caught on in Japan. The fish started to breed and form slight color variations. Koi, often referred to as "Nishikigoi," are actually descendants of the common carp, though the koi of today are more brightly hued and ornamental fish than carp.

Koi can become a low-maintenance family pet. These fish tend to grow accustomed to having people around, and will often interact with visitors at the surface of the water. It's not unusual to have koi beg for food or take food from a person's hand.

Another benefit of koi ponds is that they create a miniature ecosystem within the yard. When stocked with aquatic plants and other fish that can help keep mosquito larvae and other parasites at bay, they can sustain themselves quite nicely.

Ponds also can attract birds and beneficial insects, such as butterflies and dragonflies. By implementing straight vertical walls on the perimeter of the pond and setting up some natural barriers, homeowners can avoid unwanted predators from disturbing their koi ponds.

Koi ponds also provide some psychological benefits. The sound of the water can be soothing and relaxing. Sitting by the pond may help alleviate stress, as unwinding next to a pond and watching the fish swim by can help individuals decompress.

Homeowners who have koi ponds may also benefit socially from these eye-catching additions to their landscapes.

Homeowners may connect with others who share their passion for koi and water features. **CL**

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Moon Nicknames

This month, the full moon – or the full "Flower" moon – falls on the 10th. Appropriately named as spring warmth triggers the blossoming of flowers. Native Americans started naming moons to help track the seasons. There was a lot of variability, between regions and tribes – at times leading to the same moon having more than one name. Over time, the naming was streamlined and applied to the Gregorian calendar.

In January, there is the Wolf Moon as during the month wolves would howl out of hunger. Next, there is the Snow Moon in February, due to the snowy nature of the month. March has the Worm Moon, as the softening ground allows earthworms to emerge. In April, there is the Pink Moon, not due to the color of the moon but of the ground phlox flower that becomes widespread during spring. June features the Strawberry Moon, as this is the time when harvesting of the fruit typically happens. In July, with bucks growing new antlers, it's the Buck Moon. August has the Sturgeon Moon, as it is the time to best catch this fish. In September there is the Harvest Moon. With colder months ahead, the Hunter's Moon signals the time to hunt in October. The 11th month of the year has the Beaver Moon, corresponding to the time to set traps. Finally, in December there is the Cold Moon – aptly named for the longer nights and colder temperatures. **CL**

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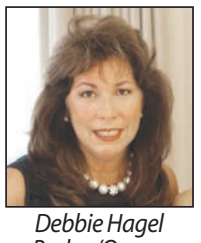
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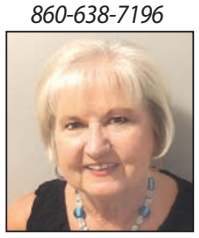
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SOLD 93 Washington Road

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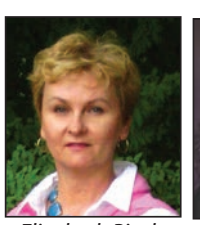
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